

OPEGA Recommendation for Project Direction

DHHS Workplace Culture and Environment

Background

The Government Oversight Committee (GOC) placed a review of the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Workplace Culture and Environment on OPEGA's work plan at its April 26, 2013 meeting. The general scope of the assigned review was whether DHHS' workplace culture and environment, including management behavior and treatment of employees in the workplace, is conducive to recruiting, retaining and engaging capable, knowledgeable and motivated employees.

The GOC assigned this review to OPEGA after legislators and OPEGA received complaints from current and former DHHS employees about DHHS' workplace culture and environment. At multiple GOC meetings, committee members discussed a number of issues concerning DHHS workplace culture and environment in general and specifically in connection to OPEGA's 2013 review of Maine Center for Disease Control (MCDC).

The Preliminary Research phase for this project is complete. During this phase OPEGA:

- Reviewed and summarized complaints from former and current DHHS employees;
- Interviewed management at DHHS and Department of Administration and Financial Services (DAFS) Bureau of Human Resources;
- Interviewed Maine State Employees Association (MSEA) personnel;
- Reviewed and analyzed 2013 and 2014 DHHS Employee Climate Survey Data;
- Analyzed MSEA Grievance and DAFS Termination Data for DHHS and other State departments;
- Researched public and private sector organizational culture issues and reviewed studies of organizational culture in the public sector; and
- Reviewed materials provided by DHHS on actions taken by individual offices since the 2014 Employee Climate survey.

Summary of Preliminary Research and Analysis

There is no universal agreed upon definition of organizational culture however, there are some terms and concepts common across various definitions. Together the definitions describe organizational culture as *the underlying, enduring core values, assumptions, and expectations, often tacit and unwritten, which are shared within an organization and expressed in the behavior of its members.*

Personnel data on termination rates and union data on employee grievances indicate similar trends for DHHS and other executive branch agencies as a group in recent years. DAFS Bureau of Human Resources reported personnel management changes made by the current administration that affect all Executive branch agencies and may be contributing to complaints received from DHHS employees. While the data indicate the rate of grievances and terminations for selected reasons OPEGA identified as associated with employee dissatisfaction at DHHS is higher than average among executive branch agencies, DHHS is in a group of several agencies with relatively higher rates and does not stand out as an extreme case.

Organizational issues do not appear to be widespread at DHHS. Complaints received by OPEGA were primarily from personnel in three units of DHHS: the Division of Licensing and Regulatory Services' (DLRS) child care licensing unit, MCDC, and Riverview Psychiatric Center (RPC). DHHS' employee climate surveys in 2013 and 2014 indicate a workforce that is, overall, satisfied with the climate and work environment although there are areas, such as communication, that need improvement. The surveys also show higher levels of dissatisfaction in some, although not all, of the same divisions from which OPEGA received complaints. DHHS' Office of Continuous Quality Improvement (OCQI) reported sharing the Employee Climate Survey results with individual offices and divisions within DHHS and suggesting offices address issues identified in the survey. OPEGA has gathered and reviewed information provided by the OCQI on subsequent follow-up activities at the office level.

OPEGA will be reviewing, or has recently reviewed, several DHHS offices that are highlighted in complaints and in the survey data: a review of MCDC was completed in 2013, a review of RPC is underway, and a review of the DLRS' child care licensing unit is on OPEGA's 2015 work plan.

Through our review of literature on organizational culture in public sector organizations, OPEGA identified common themes in the corrective actions recommended to improve organizational culture and increase employee engagement. In particular, recommendations often center on making improvements in the areas of communication, supervisory training, personnel policies, employee input and oversight of management.

OPEGA Recommendation

OPEGA recommends discontinuing the review of DHHS Workplace Culture and Environment at this time and producing an Information Brief summarizing the results of our preliminary research and suggested opportunities for improvement. We can provide information to give perspective on the culture at DHHS and the actions the department is already taking toward improvement. We believe there would be minimal added benefit to expending additional resources on a more detailed review.